

NIGER DELTA WATCH 2019

A citizen-led election observation project

Report: Niger Delta Watch 2019 #3

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Report period: 03 – 09 December 2018

Summary

This is the third edition of Niger Delta Watch 2019. This week we are pleased for the first time to include graphics illustrating some of the data the project has been able to gather. Incidents submitted by Election Observers in Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta are in the first instance coded under one of five major election risk areas. These were identified as part of the design of a bespoke database for this project. Our analysis in future reports will look in more detail at the types of incidents these risk areas include, with more details made available on the project website. The risk areas are:

- Violence.
- Fraud and corruption.
- Political party and campaign misconduct.
- Electoral preparations, procedures and standards.
- Voter, civil society and other intimidation.

Note that the project will also report on good practice and other election support initiatives taking place around the Niger Delta.

One major observation from the data reported so far is that Delta State has seen the highest number of incidents reported overall. Ndokwa West Local Government Area (LGA), itself in Delta, has been the most eventful LGA.

Meanwhile Rivers State continues to lead on incidents that have the most graphic impact, this week including a gang clash reported to have lasted over three days on the fringes of Port Harcourt, which allegedly led to the deaths of seven people.

In Akwa Ibom, our reporting is a qualitative assessment based on a smaller number of Election Observers than elsewhere. This week they have highlighted the arrest of a blogger, apparently for publishing a story that was uncomplimentary to the previous Governor of the State. Destruction of campaign materials by political opponents continues to be a problem, while an incident involving the exchange of Permanent Voters Cards (PVCs) for money was also reported.

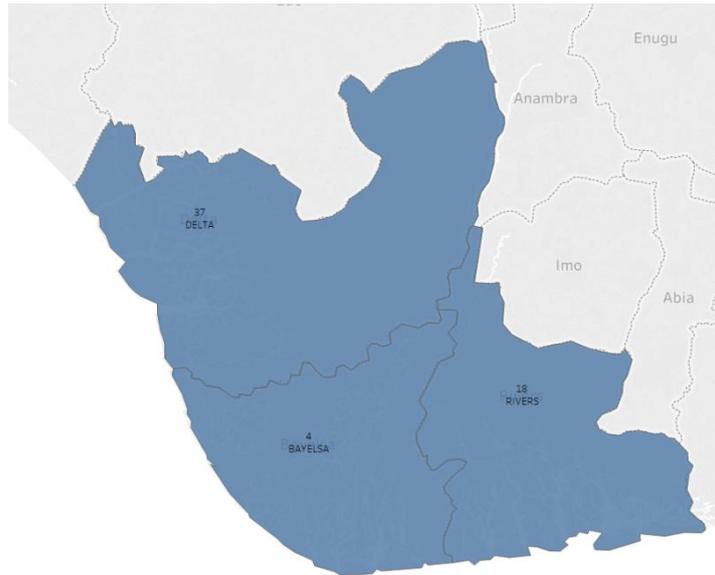
On social media, one story in particular which has been discussed is concern around the refusal of the President to give his assent to the amended Electoral bill.

Please note that Niger Delta Watch 2019 began reporting in late November 2018, and our dataset is limited. Operational challenges mean we are unable to identify every incident which takes place. The trends and other dynamics discussed in this report reflect the data available but should be seen as indicative only.

Regional Overview

The map below shows that more than half of all the 59 incidents reported to date have occurred in Delta State. Major incidents include an (as yet unreported elsewhere) reported three-day gun battle in Oroworuko in Port Harcourt.

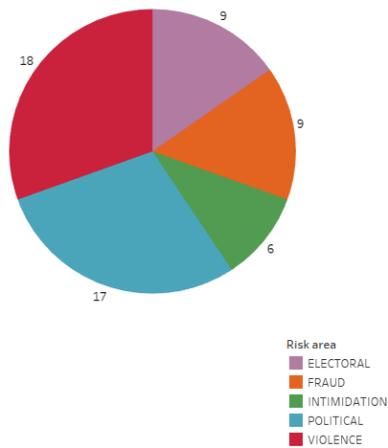
Number of incidents to date reported by Niger Delta Watch 2019 Observers from 22 November in Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta



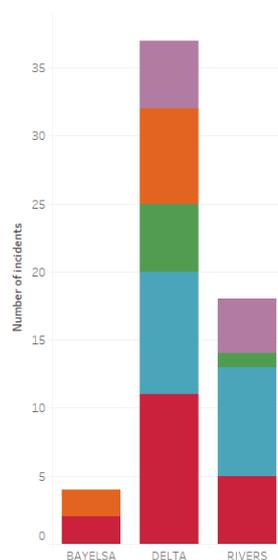
More than half of all incidents relate to violence, or political parties and their campaigns:

Number of incidents to date reported by Niger Delta Watch 2019 Observers by risk area in Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta

Reported incidents by risk area



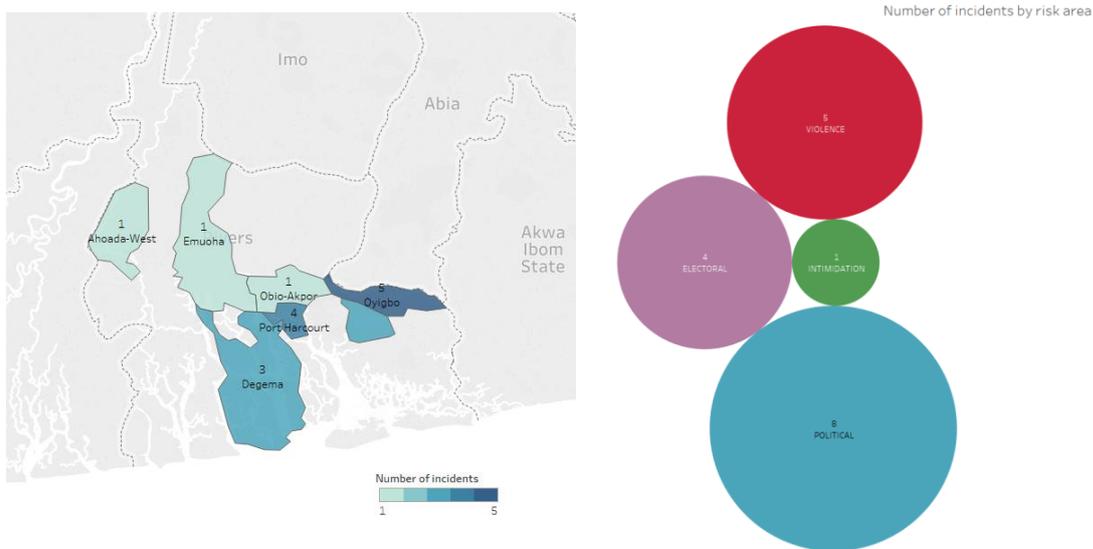
Reported incidents by risk area for Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers



Rivers

To date, there have been 18 incidents in Rivers recorded by Niger Delta Watch 2019, in seven of the LGAs that Election Observers are reporting on. Some of these suggest the risk of further violence, including the attempted kidnap of a politician, and a gang clash in Oroworuko. Other incidents highlight some of the dilemmas of incident reporting as there have been several killings and clashes where there are suspicions, but no concrete evidence yet, that they are politically linked.

Number of incidents to date reported by Niger Delta Watch 2019 Observers from 22 November in Rivers by LGA and risk area



On December 12 the State Court of Appeal in Port Harcourt ruled against three APC appeals on a State Court ruling that struck out all its state candidates for the 2019 polls. The APC has pointed out it has three further appeals on aspects of the case pending for ruling. It is still possible that something decisive may happen at the level of the Supreme Court but it has also just set judgement for a key enforcement application for March 08. So it seems likely that APC candidates will remain in doubt but it is far from certain that any decisive ruling will remove them from the ballot before February 16. One distinct feature of the situation in Rivers State is that aside from campaign visits to communities there appears to be a distinct lack of conventional campaigning – especially in Port Harcourt. Neither of the major parties are investing significantly in billboards or other conventional expenditure that would be expected in a closely fought contest.

03-09 December – selected incidents:

Port Harcourt:

- There was a reported gun battle for three consecutive days from 05-07 December in Oroworukwu town. The clash, which was speculated to have claimed seven lives, was between the Icelanders cult group and rival Greenlanders cult group. It was reported that the Iceland cult group invaded the territory of the Greenlanders during the burial ceremony of one of the Greenlanders. Further investigations suggest that the cult groups are fighting to assert local control on behalf of PDP and opposition APC candidates they support.
- On 11 December, the Governor, while receiving US Consul General John Bray, accused the Federal Government of non-readiness to conduct the 2019 general elections, and of luring

INEC and security agencies to manipulate the electioneering process. He called on the US to warn and watch the federal government to ensure free and fair elections. In a separate statement he called the President's refusal to sign the Electoral Amendment Act a threat to the nation's democracy.

- A leading cult (gang) member, Christian Kenjika (Schoolboy) was reported killed in Ikwerre in a clash with soldiers where several were injured. He was alleged to have been involved in kidnappings and robberies and also alleged to be responsible for a November attack on an earlier reported PDP exercise in the LGA

Tai

- There was an attempted kidnap of the member representing Tai State Constituency in the Rivers State House of Assembly, Hon. Mathew Dike (PDP formerly APC). The attempt was reportedly foiled by youth in the community. One of the suspects was apprehended, and their vehicle seized and handed over to the Tai LGA Divisional Police Station. The incident happened on December 09.
- The attempt by a PDP supporter to stop an APC supporter from posting a campaign poster on a particular sign post, close to Tai LGA central market square, resulted in the destruction of both APC and PDP posters, and created panic and fear of the breakdown of law and order in the area.

Khana

- The association of retired military and paramilitary personnel in Ogoni, an umbrella organisation for retired security and military officers of Ogoni extraction, said in a press briefing that they remain apolitical and do not support any party nor endorse any candidate. They said voters are free to vote any candidate of their choice in the 2019 elections.
- The PDP in the LGA embarked on a peaceful ward to ward verification of PDP liaison officers.

Oyigbo

- The billboard of an APC candidate for Eleme /Tai /Oyigbo Federal Constituency was destroyed by unknown hoodlums in Oyigbo Town.
- The APC youth leader in ward eight of Oyigbo LGA, Comrade Emeka Ihu was attacked on the night of 07 December, while trying to prevent others from destroying an APC billboard.

Ahoada West

- In a traditional wedding of the daughter of Hon. Chief S. Ezekwem, in Oyiba community, APC and PDP LGA key stakeholders were in attendance. Both party stalwarts were seen fraternising with the host and making new friends in the arena.
- In the burial ceremony of a former Secretary to the State Government at Isua, Joinkrama-2, the PDP dominated attendance, headed by the Chairman of Ahoada West LGA, who used the occasion to canvas for votes in the 2019 election.

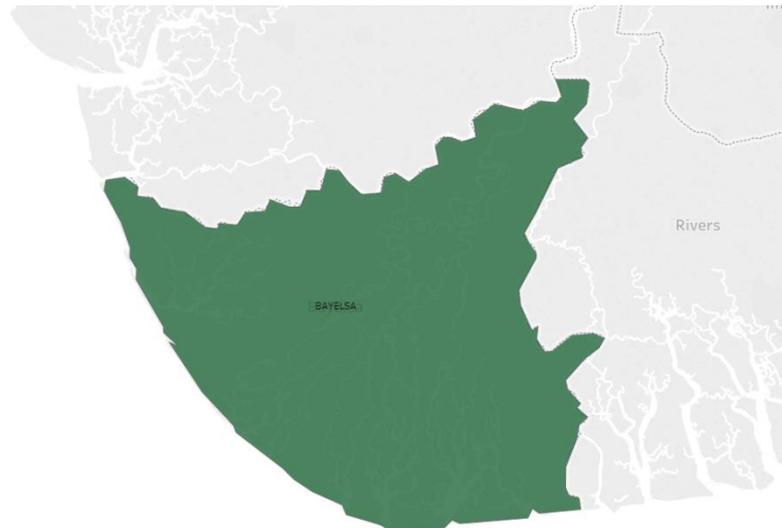
Degema

- In Tombia town, a PDP supporting youth group issued a threat to attack anyone in the community who votes for a different party. The youth group is reported to support a former militant turned politician, member of the State House of Assembly Hon. Farah Dagogo.

Bayelsa

This week in Bayelsa, the focus was on the burial ceremonies of two prominent people, including the mother of the Governor, which dominated events in Bayelsa West Senatorial District, and the High Chief Lionel Jonathan Omo, an APC chieftain who died in Bayelsa East Senatorial District. The occasions were used for political fraternisation although with little open campaigning. This week, elections preparations took place without major incidents in Brass, Southern Ijaw and Yenagoa. However, there was violence leading to fatalities in Nembe and Ogbia, and an incident of fraud and corruption in Ekeremor.

Bayelsa State



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03-09 December – selected incidents:

Nembe

- On 10 December, violence was reported in Nembe-Bassambiri, when a member of the Icelanders cult group attacked and killed another cult member belonging to the Greenlanders. The Greenlanders retaliated and left one person critically injured. The two groups allegedly have ties with the two major parties and the violence is believed to be as a result of rising tension among party supporters as the election draws closer. Youth and Community leaders intervened and arrests were made on 11 of December.
- Although the APC team was in Nembe during the week for further consultations and campaigns, no other serious incident occurred.

Ogbia

- On 9 December, political violence was reported in Emeyal Town, where a man was killed supposedly because of his rising political profile. He was seen as a grassroots mobiliser and had the support of certain political actors. His assailants are yet to be identified.

- Continuous destruction of campaign posters and billboards was reported in Ogbia Constituency III, in Otuasega, Kolo, Imiringi and Emeyal. It appears that when an aspirant's posters or billboard are destroyed, their supporters destroy others.

Brass

- Party campaigns continued without any major incident during the week. Security agencies and community leaders are handling the inter-party conflict in Twon-Brass.
- Observers are watching how the campaigns are unfolding in the LGA. There are signs of adherence to INEC guidelines for political campaigns.

Ekeremor

- There was an apparent incident of fraud and corruption in Ekeremor Town, as ADC candidates for Ekeremor Constituency I and his campaign team shared money to community leaders, chiefs, women, CDC and youths. It seems that some prospective voters may be compromised before the election date.

Southern Ijaw

- Political campaigns went on without any significant incidents.
- There were campaigns in Amassoma, Korokorosei and Okpotuwari with no serious reported incidents.

Sagbama

- The week was dominated by the burial ceremony of the Governor's mother, and political activities virtually came to a standstill.

Kolokuma/Opokuma

- There are allegations that include discussion of specific meetings this week around the campaign of both major parties (APC and PDP) making plans to bribe election officials in the local government. Each side appears to have some awareness of the other's intentions and discussions at present highlight the prospects for outbidding the other party with officials.

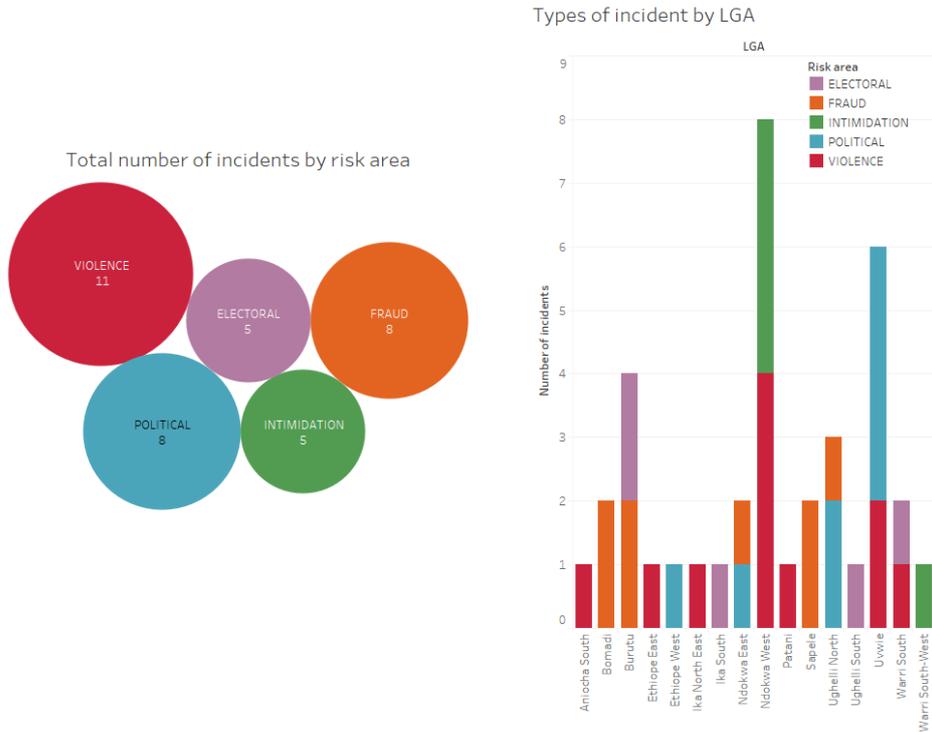
Yenagoa

- No major incidents were reported.
- Campaigns led by PDP aspirants continued with visits to several communities.
- The security challenges in some part of the LGA (Okordia-Zarama-Biseni) continued.
- There are allegations that certain politicians are going outside the State to hire political mercenaries for the forthcoming elections.

Delta

The total number of incidents reported on by Niger Delta Watch 2019’s Election Observers in Delta State to date is 37.

Number of incidents to date reported by Niger Delta Watch 2019 Observers from 22 November in Delta State



The highest number of incidents relate to violence, and almost half of these have taken place in Ndokwa West – which has been the most eventful LGA overall, according to our data – and Uvwie, which has also seen the highest number of incidents relating to political parties and their campaigning.

03-09 December – selected incidents:

Reports this week included incidents involving the destruction of political campaign billboards, and an accusation of spying at political campaign meetings. Another incident relates to the apparent adoption of campaign strategies focusing on ethnic identity to secure voter support. Given the multi-ethnic nature of the Warri region, which include the Ijaws, Urhobos and Itsekiris, this has the potential to foster animosity between groups, some of which are already divided. Specific incidents are highlighted below:

Ndokwa West

- A known PDP supporter and surveyor was murdered in his house by unknown persons.
- On 04 December in Kwale, four men alleged to be of Fulani origin were apprehended in connection to recent kidnap cases around and within Ndokwa West.

- Also in Kwale, on 05 December 2018, the alleged leader of a cult gang known as ‘*master*’ was killed in a clash between some cult groups. In previous elections, cult groups have been patronised by political actors for ballot snatching and stuffing as well as other forms of electoral malpractices.

Ndokwa East

- On December 07 an appeal court in Benin rejected a stay of execution on a state court ruling earlier this year removing the Deputy Speaker of the Delta State House of assembly, Friday Osanebi, representing Ndokwa East for falsifying certificates. Some community members within the LGA and APC supporters celebrated the ruling. Osanebi has said he is appealing the stay of execution order to the Supreme Court.

Warri South

- A meeting was held in the residence of one of the PDP Chieftains. The main agenda was reportedly the formation of structures and campaign groups to support the sitting Governor in the 2019 elections. The meeting also allegedly considered information concerning APC supporters of ex-Governor Dr. Emmanuel Uduaghan, where it was alleged they are urging particular ethnic groups not to vote for the PDP Governorship candidate, and the perception that the APC is intending to use security agents to intimidate voters and disrupt the forthcoming elections.
- In a separate PDP meeting this week, it was apparently discovered that some youth believed to be APC members were present, which led to accusations that they were spies, and fighting. Some people were injured.

Ughelli North

- There has been further destruction of the posters and billboards of some PDP aspirants by unknown persons.

Ethiope East

- A group of thugs disrupted a political meeting called by the state PDP chairman chief Kingsley Esiso. It was reported that the thugs stated that they were looking for the PDP flag bearer for the House of Assembly, alleging that he had betrayed them after voting for him in 2015 for the Labour party, but later seeing him defect to the PDP. However, he was apparently not at the meeting.

Akwa Ibom

Political parties are continuing their campaigning. There have been some concerning developments. During the week under review, a blogger in the state was arrested and detained for allegedly publishing a story that was uncomplimentary to the previous governor and APC leader Godswill Akpabio. There was also a case of a PDP candidate inciting his supporters to violence against his APC opponents, and of the destruction of PDP candidate's campaign materials by APC supporters.

Destruction of campaign materials by political opponents continues to be a problem across the State, with the leading parties levelling accusations of this at each other. In the State capital, Uyo, several billboards belonging to Nsima Ekere (APC Governorship Candidate) were vandalised in the first week of the campaign.

From Eyotai Community, Udung Uko Local Government Area, came a report of the exchange of Permanent Voters Cards (PVCs) for money. We do not, as yet, understand the full purpose of this exchange but it has the apparent makings of vote buying.

These events are discussed further below.

- In Uyo, a popular blogger was arrested, detained and charged in court, allegedly on the orders of Senator Akpabio. The blogger was detained at the police headquarters, Ikot Akpan Abia, for allegedly publishing defamatory materials against the senator and former Governor of Akwa Ibom State, Godswill Akpabio. News reports say the blogger, Utitofon Morgan Ukpong, publisher of *Sitippe Ke Akwa Ibom*, was detained on the strength of a petition personally signed by Senator Akpabio and the APC Governorship candidate, Nsima Ekere. He was released on bail at a magistrate court in Uyo on Wednesday 5 December, 2018 after spending two nights in detention. Ini Ememobong, one of the five lawyers who represented Ukpong in court, is also the spokesperson of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in Akwa Ibom.
- It was alleged that during a campaign meeting in Eastern Obolo LGA, on Sunday, December 9, 2018, a PDP candidate openly urged his supporters in the area to attack and stop candidates of the APC and their supporters whenever they are found to be campaigning in the area.
- In Ikot Ekong, Mkpato Enin, a second incident involving political party and campaign misconduct was reported, which saw PDP candidate campaign materials destroyed by APC supporters. Several campaign posters belonging to Gov. Udom Emmanuel, the PDP governorship flag bearer, Hon. Francis Uduyok, the PDP House of Representatives candidate for Mkpato Enin/Eastern Obolo/Ikot Abasi federal constituency, and Uduak Ududoh, PDP House of Assembly flag bearer for the area (Eastern Obolo/Ikot Abasi State Constituency), were observed being torn in various locations across the three LGAs. One APC supporter tore posters of Uduyok and bragged that he would not allow any PDP campaign materials in his community.
- An incident of electoral fraud and corruption was observed in Eyotai, Udung Uko, during which suspected APC agents were witnessed paying eligible voters in Eyotai community the sum of five thousand naira in exchange for their PVC numbers. It was not clear at the time what was the intent of the party agents, but some community members were of the view that it could be used for cloning of voter cards.

Social media

One of the main national level election-relevant topics being discussed locally in the Niger Delta on social media over the last two weeks is the President's refusal to sign the electoral bill.

President Buhari announced he would only sign the bill once the 2019 elections had ended, as doing so in the run-up would create uncertainty. People responded negatively to this on social media, with some saying that he is insincere about the upcoming election. Users took to Twitter to express their views, with some calling Buhari a 'tiger' and 'tyrant'. This type of commentary can often be influenced by bots. However, after investigation into this story, it was established that the discussion was not influenced by bots in this case.

In separate activity, a social media aide to the President, Laretta Onochie, was identified as spreading fake news. The story, reported by the Guardian newspaper, described how Onochie made claims that PDP Presidential candidate, Atiku Abubakar, distributed cash and food at his rally held in Sokoto on Monday 3 December. Onochie tweeted a photo of food packs with N500 attached to them and the caption "KEEP THEM IN POVERTY, THEN GIVE THEM HANDOUTS – ATIKU in Sokoto yesterday", implying that the photos came from Abubakar's Sokoto campaign rally. The image was crosschecked as false by Guardian Nigeria's Lolade Nwanze for CrossCheck. [Source: <https://guardian.ng/news/buhari-aide-posts-fake-pictures-attack-atiku/>].

Onochie also got involved in the social media debate on the electoral bill, saying that Atiku Abubakar and others were intending to use the electoral bill to rig the elections. She argued that President Buhari was right to veto the electoral bill because of alleged PDP changes to the wording affecting the counting of votes. [Source: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/12/exposed-how-pdp-wants-to-rig-2019-elections-lauretta-onochie/>].

Her claim seems to be lifted directly from tweets from Abubakar Usman (@mrabusadiq) making the same claim and citing a publication called The Suspect.

Usman's tweet on the topic was the highest profile response on the day with over 1,000 likes and retweets but also demonstrably false. The wording change on counting had no real impact because it was spelled out in other parts of the same section, which would explain why there was never an objection from the Presidency.

Topics of interest

The following discussions have emerged in Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers on social media in the last fortnight:

Bayelsa

Social media activity related to the elections has been lively over the last two weeks in Bayelsa State, although here has been no observed inflammatory or misleading speech on social media monitored during the last fortnight. Facebook pages in particular have been discussing Bayelsa politics. Some of the content which has been discussed on Facebook over the last two weeks includes:

- Barr. Lawrence Ewhrudjakpo has been using his Facebook page for campaigning activities, ranging from posts to video uploads, both of which have had positive reactions from a

significant number of people. He is a PDP Aspirant contesting for the Bayelsa West Senatorial District.

- Hon. Preye Oseke has, on his Facebook page, posted pictures and videos from his “Meet the people” tour on his Facebook page which took place on 07 December. Preye Oseke who is a PDP Aspirant for the Southern Ijaw Federal Constituency also posted a brief manifesto on his page.
- An APC Aspirant contesting for the Brass-Nembe Federal Constituency, Hon. Israel Sunny Goli posted a picture of him receiving a royal blessing from HRM King Ebitimi Banigo (OFR), Okpo XXI, Amayanabo of Okpoama Kingdom on his Facebook page. There was an increased reaction to the post as the blessing of a King in the Ijaw Society is seen as one of the important aspects of winning an election. Other activities on the page included campaign posts.

Delta

In Delta over the last two weeks, the political atmosphere on social media has been relatively calm. However, there has been an increase in social media campaign and other electoral activities, with the emergence of new political social media groups, forums and pages. For instance,

- One of these is The Delta Central Equity Group, formed to galvanise support for the reelection of the incumbent governor. The group seeks to ensure the current governor, who has already been in his role for one four-year term, continues on for another four years.
- There was strong debate in the group ‘Liberate – Delta People’s Movement’ concerning the PDP presidential candidate, with a social media user calling the candidate a ‘looter’.

Rivers

The following stories were popular on social media in Rivers during the last two weeks:

- On 05 December, the police in Rivers State stopped two political parties from holding political campaigns in the same LGA on the same date. The case was widely discussed, particularly on NigerianInfoPH, which is one of the leading media stations in the State.
- A debate for Rivers gubernatorial candidates was discussed on both traditional and new media platforms. People were asked to nominate four Governorship candidates by sending their names and political parties to the Rivers Debate group. [NB: SDN is involved in the organisation of this debate].

About Niger Delta Watch 2019

Niger Delta Watch 2019 is a citizen-led elections observation project reporting on the 2019 Nigerian presidential and governorship elections. The project focuses on the states of Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, and Akwa Ibom. It is a joint initiative of Stakeholder Democracy Network (SDN) and the Civil Society Situation Room (CSSR), and builds on previous election observation work carried out by SDN, including during the 2011 and 2015 election cycles.

The goal of Niger Delta Watch 2019 is to generate accurate information on the election campaign as it unfolds, for the benefit of the Nigerian government, its electoral agencies, and journalists, researchers, civil society organisations and others working to support democracy in Nigeria.

The project's reporting is based on information generated and analysed by approximately 100 citizen Election Observers, Data Analysts, and Social Media Analysts.

Please visit www.stakeholderdemocracy.org/elections2019 for more information on all aspects of this project, including how the reports are produced. We are also keen to hear how the reports could be made more useful.

Disclaimer: *this report is produced as part of a Niger Delta elections observation project being led by SDN in partnership with the Nigerian Civil Society Situation Room. The project is funded by the UK's Department for International Development. Please note that the information and analysis contained in the report do not necessarily represent the views or policies of the British government.*

Note that the information and analysis contained in these reports do not represent the views of any one organisation. SDN and CSSR have made efforts to ensure that the information is accurate, but will aim to correct any errors or omissions as new information emerges.

The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) was consulted for training in data management and visualisation for this project. Democracy Reporting International led the training of Election Observers participating in this project.

